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*Selections from Goethe's Poems.* By Charles Harris, Western Reserve University; pp. xvii, 286. D. C. Heath & Co., 1899.

IN the little volume before us Professor Harris has culled out what seemed to him the most choice of Goethe's shorter poems and arranged them in chronological order. There are added, by way of commentary, such data as the present *Stand der Goethe-Forschung* affords, the object being to show the intimate connection between the life and art of the poet. 'We may say of many poems that they came into being of necessity just when they did, that an earlier or a later origin would have been impossible' (p. xii). Of course Dr. Harris does not say that all that Goethe wrote stood in this intimate relation to his experiences, yet considering these non-subjective poems he says (p. xii), 'such productions cannot generally be considered the best.'

Among the number selected—152 out of a total of 745, as numbered by Viehoff—there are the gems universally acknowledged to be such: *Der Fischer*, *Der Erlkönig*, *Der Sänger*, *Mignon*, *Wandrer's Nachtlid*, *An den Mond*, *Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh*, etc., etc.

The selections are certainly representative, and the editor has proven his intimate knowledge of the *Altmeister*. Undoubtedly, the student who desires to supplement his study of Goethe's life by semi-biographical literature, will find many striking proofs of the subjective element in the poet's art. He will find the 'great confession' theory amply supported in the present little volume and will find that he is being led up the stream to the source.

But—and we crave Dr. Harris' pardon for venturing the question—is it worth while, is it well to ask the average American college or university student (and for him the book is evidently intended) to read anything but the best Goethe, or any other foreign writer, has given us? To our mind, the editor claims too much in saying that Goethe's minor poems are 'the field in which he is greatest.' Moreover to us there seems a heaven-wide difference in beauty and worth of the non-subjective *Es war ein König in Thule*, or the *Sänger*, or the *Fischer* and the *Lili's Park*, or the *Diné zu Koblenz*. The fact that in these last (and similar) poems Goethe gives objectivity to

some of his kaleidoscopic experiences does not give them the universality a perfect work of art demands. Is it too much to ask that a poem, a ballad or a lyric, if it is to rank as 'best,' shall be self-interpretative, irrespective of the occasion that called it forth? Is there not a certain danger in this search for sources, the danger, namely, that the idea and the ideals, sought to be expressed by the poet, shall be obscured or suffer loss? Goethe himself seems to have felt this danger. In the arrangement of the collected works (1815) he purposely refrained from observing the chronological or any other recognizable principle. We know that poems of the earlier and the later literary activity are placed side by side. Evidently the lines

Töne, Lied, aus weiter Ferne  
Säusle heimlich, nächster Nähe  
So der Freude, so dem Wehe!  
Blinken doch auch so die Sterne.  
Alles Gute wirkt geschwinder  
Alte Kinder, junge Kinder  
Hören's immer gerne,

apply in the premises and give us the poet's canon of art.

For those classes who feel inclined to follow out Goethe's fortunes, including his love troubles and triumphs, his scientific and literary contentions—*Xenien*—and who wish to obtain the literary precipitate of these experiences, Dr. Harris' little volume will be a welcome gift. As a commentary to Goethe's life the book is admirably arranged. There is added a short resumé or Biographical List of Persons mentioned in the Poems and Notes and an Index of First Lines.

LAURENCE FOSSLER.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA.